The development of the Shilluk kingship has thus produced, though not in a very pronounced or rigid form, a social hierarchy of royal house, nobility (other members of the royal clan), and commoners (including persons of client origin).

THE KINGSHIP

If we are to understand the place of the kingship in Shilluk society we must, I think, beware of attempts to define it in terms of judicial and administrative functions and view it rather as a ritual office and in a wider political context. In 1903 Father Tappi wrote that the authority of the king is 'absolute'.[1] Professor and Mrs Seligman have described the king as 'absolute head—temporal and spiritual—of a state whose territory is divided into a number of provinces, each administered by a chief directly responsible to the sovereign and acting as his proxy',[2] and Professor Westermann has also written of the power of the king as 'absolute'.[3] Father Hofmayr says that 'Mit dem Regierungsantritt ist der König Herr des Landes, das er nach Belieben vergeben

[1] P. C. Tappi, 'Notes Ethnologiques sur les Chillouks', *Bull. Soc. Khediv. de Géog.* (1903), p. 122.
[2] *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (1932), p. 39.
[3] *Op. cit.* p. xlvii.

9:Howell E-5 (1937-1950) 1952 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

Government, with periodic modifications, has utilized existing divisions of the country as administrative units, and has drawn its agents from the dominant lineages of each, thus creating a hierarchy of chiefs responsible to the *reth* himself; but this is not necessarily evidence that such a system was a reality in the past. On this subject Pumphrey expresses the opinion that, 'The power of the *Reths* before the Turkish interference was undoubtedly great. It was based partly on the semi-divinity with which tribal tradition clothes them and partly upon their great wealth in cattle and slaves. Justice was probably rough and large-scale fighting more prevalent than litigation, such law-suits as there were being seen, as previously mentioned, either by the settlement chief or by the *Reth* at Fashoda.' He adds in a footnote that 'The *Reth* is said to have had the enviable privilege of killing a tiresome litigant with a club.'[1] In an unpublished record Pumphrey goes farther than this and says:

I do not think it is true to say that as far back as Shilluk tradition goes, there is a system of administration and Courts with the *reth* at the head of it and powers descending through the heads of provinces, whom we call Court Chiefs, to heads of sections down to the village headman. . . . Naturally as one Chief or another attained to local prestige, he would tend to attract cases to him, and certainly for a period the princesses of Dettim used to see local cases. There were, however, only four regular offices under the *reth*. The Chiefs of Luak and Gerr lived on either side of Fashoda and were his right-hand men. The Chiefs of Muomo and Tonga were chiefs of the marches whose definite job it was to keep a look out for invading enemies. Apart from this, however, the Chiefs of the marches were also the *reth*'s representatives in the two extremes of the country and used both to see cases themselves and send along to Fashoda those cases which they thought the *reth* should see. Beneath these four officials were the Chiefs (*jyak*) i.e. holders of the *lau*.[2] Our present 'Section Chiefs' are only *some* of them *lau* holders, for the reason that 'sections' (occasionally somewhat arbitrarily formed) contain usually several original villages and each village has a *lau* (by an 'original village' I mean the parent village of a group of off shoots of villages). It was through these *jyak* and through these four senior officials that the Shilluk country used to be ruled. The *reth* did not tour much, but had the people sent to him at Fashoda. If a killing occurred, the offending lineage would have to produce a girl and a boy. The girl would be handed to the brother (or near relative) of the dead man and the boy would go to be slave to the *reth*. If the case was not settled, or if one village went to fight with another one without sufficient cause, the *reth* would send his army (*tick*) to take all the cattle from the offending village, or, if necessary burn their villages. This army would consist of one or more of the adjacent villages, its strength depending on the amount of potential resistance. Any number of sections could be raised and it seems that the sections so instructed were glad to go, since the *reth*'s army was seldom, if ever, opposed and consequently there was little bloodshed, but a certain amount of booty.[3]

Pumphrey's opinions may seem somewhat contradictory, but it is clear that he thinks there was no highly efficient State system with an all-powerful *reth* at the head.

Evans-Pritchard points out that:

it is unlikely that the so-called 'provinces' were in fact more than districts or that they were in any sense administrative departments before they were made into something of the kind by foreign governments. Moreover, though doubtless the king exercised considerable influence in the country and may have confirmed settlement chiefs in office, he did not

[1] Pumphrey, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
[2] *lau*, robe of office given by the *reth*.
[3] Pumphrey: Unpublished records. Undated: *circa* 1936.

9:Howell E-5 (1937-1950) 1952 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

631 642 nominate them. They were heads of settlements in virtue of their position as heads of lineages dominant in those settlements and although they had certain duties to the king it is, I think, wrong to describe them as being in any sense administrative officials. To use such terms as 'state', 'government', and 'administration' in speaking of the Shilluk political system would appear to me, in the light of what is now known of it, to be a mistake.[1]

My own opinion is in accordance with these views. At any rate, if such terms are used, it should be made clear that they are qualified by the considerations already mentioned. In comparison with modern conceptions of an organized State system, or with such highly developed political institutions as are found in some African kingdoms, such as that of the Baganda, the Shilluk system cannot be said to have reached, without external influences, a high degree of rigidity or efficiency. When compared, however, with the acephalous systems of their Nuer and Dinka neighbours, it is apparent that the Shilluk had, even in early times, advanced much farther along the road towards 'politically organized society'.

Homicide and Blood-feuds: The *Reth*'s Rôle as Peacemaker

171 682 A study of the laws of homicide is likely to reveal, not only the nature of the legal system and whether or not a system of public law was in existence in the past, but also whether such law was in fact enforced by the *reth* or his representatives. In an acephalous society like that of the Nuer, and probably among the Dinka as well, we know that homicide was, until the advent of the present Government, treated purely as a private delict subject to retaliatory or restitutive sanctions. Thus an act of homicide would instantly lead to a blood-feud between the two segments of society concerned. A feud could be composed either by retaliation against the person of the killer or one of his kinsmen—which might lead to yet further hostilities—or by payment of an indemnity in cattle equivalent to the life of a man, to restore the equilibrium. We know too that a special functionary existed, the *kwar kwac* or 'leopard-skin chief' of the Nuer and the *bany de ring* or 'Chief of the Spear' of the Dinka. These experts were invited by the participants to intervene and mediate between them and to supervise both the secular and ritual processes of composition and peacemaking according to accepted and conventional patterns. In no sense did they have the authority to impose their demands for peace on the people or forcefully to intervene between them. They were called upon to do so only when the will to come to terms was already there, largely determined by expediency.

We know that among the Shilluk acts of homicide were followed by feuds, often more bloody and lasting than any likely to occur among the Dinka and Nuer. We know too that blood-feuds could be composed by the payment of compensation and the performance of the ritual which accompanies such payments. But here there is a difference. While in Dinka and Nuer society there were many recognized hereditary mediators, among the Shilluk there was only one, the *reth* himself. The functions of the *reth* in the processes of peacemaking are therefore relevant. Was he, like the *kwar kwac* and the *bany de ring*, simply a mediator and ritual expert competent to conduct the negotiations only on the demand of the people themselves, or was he able to intervene between them with an independent and neutral force behind him? In collecting the accepted indemnity, did he hand it over to the injured party as compensa-

[1] Evans-Pritchard, op. cit., p. 14.

631

e) The Capital:

692

This is Fashoda where the king resides, and where the highest native court of appeal is held under the presidency of the king himself.

631

The meaning of such a political organization is quite clear. The chief of every division is not selected or appointed by the king, but elected by the group concerned, and is formally invested by a dress from the king as a symbol of his authority. The basis of the Shilluk political system is lineage or clan, and has nothing to do with blood relationship to the royal family.

642

173

The present Shilluk country, it is said, is only a part of what was the Shillukland before. Just how far the Shilluk expansion did reach is controversial. My informants insisted on the fact that Nyikang reached the confluence of the White and the Blue Niles, and built a village there; and he sent messengers northwards to scout the area, but these messengers returned after reaching the site of the present Wadi Halfa (22° north latitude), informing Nyikang of the poverty of the area. After receiving this report, Nyikang did not consider another expedition, and returned to Akurwa where he was last seen. This is quite clearly an exaggeration, because at that time the state of affairs in the central and northern Sudan was just beginning to take its present shape. Moreover, the Fung kingdom and the Arab state of Gerri were in their first phases of formation, i.e. politically and militarily strong enough, and on the watch against newcomers and adventurers.

174

What may have been the case is that probably the Shilluk, taking advantage of their capacity as good river-farers, descended the White Nile in their canoes.

133

Now the White Nile is an interesting water course from the geographical, geological and hydrological points of view. The life story of this river, though controversial, is an interesting one, but what concerns us here is that the river is very weak, shallow and broad, with many islands, many curves, studded with swamps on each side, full of grass vegetation, fords, an ill defined basin, and in the flood season the water inundates large stretches on both sides. Such a geographical environment provides an economically poor land, with no attraction to wealthy agricultural states. But, on the other hand, it provides a paradise for fishermen, refugees, and to a certain extent a good grazing and watering area for nomads during the dry season. Such a state of affairs is well described in the following quotation:

> "Le Bahar el Abiad (the White Nile) arrose ce territoire, & divisé, soit par l'art, soit par la nature, en un nombre considérable de petits canaux, il form autant de petites îles, sur chacune desquelles il y a un village ... Les habitans sont tous pêcheurs, & ont des canots avec lesquels ils remontent & descendent (le fleuve) ... " 22)

22] Bruce, 440.

17: Pumphrey G-5 (1934-1938) 1941
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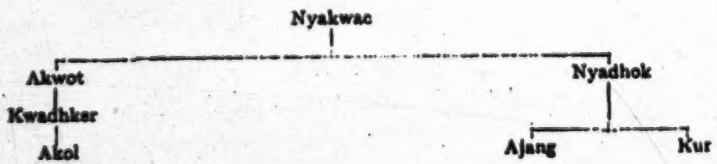
ary between them was a khor called Arepajur, just south of Fashoda. 635
The chief of Debalo Kwom, just to the south of Arepajur, was by virtue of his office the chief of Luak and the chief of the settlement of Golbafi, some five miles north of Arepajur, was by virtue of his office chief of Ger. These two chiefs, with the chiefs of Muomo settlement in the extreme north and Tonga settlement in the south, were the four high chiefs of the Shilluk Kingdom.

This symmetrical arrangement with Fashoda as its focal point 635
may be described as the indigenous system of the Shilluk government. 642
Minor disputes were settled by the settlement chiefs but in major matters government was highly centralised. The high chiefs functioned as the *Reth's* representatives. It seems that they were administrative rather than judicial functionaries and were responsible for sending to Fashoda for the *Reth's* despatch any matter of more than local importance.

THE OLD ORDER CHANGING.

The deposition of *Reth* Kwadhker by the Turkish Government in 177
favour of the puppet Ajang Nyidhok and later the attempt by Akol 635
Kwadhker, during the Mahdia, to usurp the Rethship during the absence in Omdurmán of *Reth* Kur Nyidhok led to civil wars in which the settlements lying to the north of Both espoused successively the causes of Ajang and Kur (both sons of Nyidhok)[27]. As a result the settlements from Both northwards to Kwom, which had previously been a part of Luak, refused to continue so and the boundary between the two provinces thereafter was made to the south of the settlement of Both.

27. A simplified branch of the *Kwar Reth* "tree" may help help to clarify these dynastic struggles: [173]



17: Pumphrey G-5 (1934-1938) 1941
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Thus of the present thirteen division chiefs only four hold traditional offices the others being government appointees over units based upon these rather vague confederacies. Though the four high chiefs do still possess an enhanced prestige their position is approximating rapidly to that of their less hallowed colleagues. This evolution to a more local form of government is a natural consequence of the inevitable lessening of the old autocratic power of the Rethship.

The impermanence of these confederacies is shown by a comparison between their composition in the Mahdia and their composition to-day (shown in Appendix IV), as also by the recent removal of the settlements of Mal and Abiangyei from Atodwoi Division to that of Detwok.

THE RETHSHIP.

The power of the *Reths* before Turkish interference was undoubtedly great. It was based partly on the semi-divinity with which tribal tradition clothes them and partly upon their great wealth in cattle and slaves. Justice was probably rough and large scale fighting more prevalent than litigation, such law suits as there were being seen, as previously mentioned, either by the settlement chief or by the *Reth* at Fashoda[39].

As well as wielding temporal power the *Reth* has always been the high priest of the tribal religion. Nyikang is mediator between God (*Juok*) and man, and each *Reth* is held to be a reincarnation of Nyikang. As high priest he has various obligations such as providing cattle for the sacred herds at Nyilual and Wau and providing a canoe for use at the shrine of Nyibodho (one of the Shilluk holy places).

Since the entry of the present Government the *Reth* has lost the means of acquiring wealth in cattle and is no longer allowed to have retainers of the traditional sort. He receives a substantial salary but this cannot purchase many cattle and his present comparative poverty has caused an inevitable decline in his temporal and spiritual prestige. The Rethship is living on its not inexhaustible store of divinity and the wonder is that the store has lasted so well.

39. The *Reth* is said to have had the enviable privilege of killing a tiresome litigant with a club.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

Chapter VI

SHILLUK GOVERNMENT

643 Such is the relation of the Shilluk land to the lands of neighbouring peoples and to the great countries and powers of the modern world. Yet of these latter the Shilluk thinks very little. To him, his country is the world, and its government is all-important to his well-being. That government, and indeed all concept of authority, is centred in the person of the Shilluk king.

642 *'L'état, c'est moi!'* No French monarch ever uttered that dictum with more assurance than a Shilluk king might have done had he ever heard of it, and thought it worth while to put into words what to him and all the Shilluk was a self-evident truth. Indeed, if a Shilluk were to enunciate his concept of the royal dignity, he would go much further than merely to say that the king is the state, in the sense that he is an absolute monarch who rules his people according to his own dictates, who heeds not, indeed does not need, the advice of counsellors; who merely has to state his wishes for those wishes immediately to have the effect of law. He would indeed claim such despotic power on behalf of his king, though, lest some myrmidon of the Government was within hearing, he would hasten to add that it was no longer exercised and that no modern Shilluk monarch would in fact rule his country in so arbitrary a manner, yet would further aver that the king of the Shilluk is the state, in a way, and to a degree, that no European Monarch ever was; that to say that he ruled by the 'divine right of kings' would be something of an understatement; that he was king, not merely by divine authority and approbation, but that he was a divine king. For every Shilluk king has been and must be a descendant of Nyikang, the great deified hero-king of the Shilluk. 186

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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766 at length the drums cease to throb, the last of the animals
535 are sacrificed and the meat distributed to the dancers and the people disperse to their homes. The king is dead. . . .

643 The country has not, however, remained without a king
666 all this time. The period of interregnum is one of disquiet,
[642] and there is always the real fear that one of the nyireth may make a bid for the throne. As soon as possible, then, after the
[669] king's death, within a few days in fact, the electorate council meets to choose the new king. This council is made up of eleven chiefs of the Colo, the descendants of the original companions of Nyikang, and three members of the royal houses.

[175] When Nyikang first settled the country he divided it into
[631] eleven major districts, appointing a chief to each. These chiefs were all Colo since, as Nyikang was the first Reth, the Kwareth had not then come into being. These eleven chiefs form the board of electors, and with them sit three of the
[614] Kwareth, one from each of the three royal houses, those of Papiti, Fadiet and Yor, whose sons are eligible for the kingship. Among these three families there may be as many as forty or fifty nyireth, entitled as such to consideration for the vacant throne. It is generally accepted, however, though not a hard and fast rule, that the three royal families should provide a king in rotation, and it is certainly understood that the family of the late king is automatically ruled out. Attention is therefore concentrated on the claims of the candidates from the other two houses, with the weight of opinion in favour of that one which has the more remotely provided a king. Many of the nyireth are eliminated at once on account of old age, extreme youth, physical debility, weakness of character, etc., and the merits and demerits of the rest are given serious consideration, until the number is reduced to half a dozen or less from among whom the final choice is made. How selection is finally made is the secret of the council. Sometimes the late king may have 'adopted' a certain nyireth, and thus indicated his wish in the matter of his successor. Such an indication does not mean that the king's protégé will certainly be chosen but it will have great

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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weight in the deliberations of the electorate. Sometimes, too, when the final choice is a difficult one, it would seem that the selectors have recourse to augury and divination. A number of small stones, one for each candidate, is placed in a fierce fire. A stone that glows red indicates that, under the prince it represents, cattle will be plentiful in the country; a white-hot stone would presage an abundance of grain in the new rule; one glowing both white and red would entail an era of plenty both in cattle and grain, whilst that which merely blackens and bursts would unanimously be rejected.

When the decision is at last reached, one of the great chiefs goes unobtrusively and by night to the village where the king-elect is living. During the deliberations of the electorate all nyireths are required to remain in their own homes and not to approach the neighbourhood of Fashoda; this precaution is taken to ensure that no nyireth should rush the capital and usurp the power for himself. The chief challenges the nyireth to a mock battle and when he has thus given a token of his prowess and valour the news of his election is formally broken to him. He is brought quietly, again under cover of night, to Fashoda, and at daybreak inducted with ceremony into his capital. When these preliminaries are over and the reth-elect is settled in Fashoda, the news of his election is noised abroad, and chiefs and nyireths come in from all parts of the country to pay their respects to their new king. The situation has become somewhat easier now, since with the accomplished fact, there is little likelihood of an armed insurrection taking place. There is always of course the possibility of any nyireth asserting his right to the throne and proving it by slaying the king in single combat, and in former days it was customary for the king to slaughter as many of the nyireths as he could lay his hands on—a most effective method of reducing the potential danger to himself.

The period between the election and the solemn installation of the king is roughly a year. During this time the land is, as it were, dead, for the spirit of Nyikang still lacks its habitual abode, and is under interdict. No great public dances may be held, except the funeral dances for the late

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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reth, no building may be done and the usual burning off of the grass in the early dry season is forbidden.

During this time also active preparations are on foot for the ceremonies of installation. Iron must be obtained and special ceremonial and presentation spears forged; silver, ivory and ostrich feathers procured for the making of bracelets and other ornaments; a hunting party has to make inroads (either without the knowledge or with the connivance of the government) upon a strictly protected species of antelope in order to obtain the highly prized skins which serve the purpose of purple and ermine in the installation ceremonies. The forging of the sacred spears is introduced with special ceremony; with appropriate sacrifice new fire by the immemorial method of the friction of hard wood upon soft is made and the implements of the blacksmiths blessed.

There is great activity during this period of preparation in Akurua in the north of the country, Nyikang's own sacred village. It was from here that the hero-king disappeared in a whirlwind from the sight of mortal man, and it is to Akurua that he returns in order that he may go to Fashoda to install his successor as reth. In the shrine at Akurua are housed the sacred effigies of Nyikang and his son, Dak, which are carried in procession from Akurua to Fashoda for the installation. These effigies consist of heads of ostrich feathers fixed in bamboo sockets, and are in fact fetishes, since the souls of Nyikang and Dak are believed to inhabit them. On the death of a king the old effigies are destroyed and new ones made for the installation of the reth-elect.

When preparations at Fashoda are completed, messengers are sent to Akurua to inform Nyikang that it is time to march to Fashoda. The effigies are then carried out, borne aloft by members [illegible] clan whose special prerogative this is, and start on the journey to the capital, a distance of about seventy miles. The procession moves south at a smart pace. Dak's mop of feathers on the end of a long bamboo pole looks like an oversized feather duster; Nyikang's head of ostrich plumes is very much bigger than that of his son's,